

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Hunter Junior High School
6131 West 3785 South
West Valley City, Utah 84120**

April 25-26, 2006



**Utah State Office of Education
250 East 500 South
P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Hunter Junior High School
6131 West 3785 South
West Valley City, Utah 84120**

April 25-26, 2006

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 25-26, 2006, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Hunter Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Lori Gardner is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Hunter Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Hunter Junior High School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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HUNTER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Lori Gardner..... Principal
Mary Anne Stevens..... Assistant Principal
Nancy Ward..... Assistant Principal (Intern)

Counseling

Helen Rathke..... Counselor
Karel Nelson Counselor
Tupou Ofahengaue..... Counselor (Intern)
Amanda Quist Counselor (Intern)

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Jill Allen	Teresa Burdine	Travis Dahl
Heather Allred	Gorden Campbell	Kristine Davis
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Royele Monk
Josh Moore
Brian Murray
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Marsha Newby
Wendell Oakeson

Roxanne Park
Diana Peterson
Bryan Stephens
Ashley Talbot
Penney Tyree
Robert Vert
Bill Walker
Ken Woods

HUNTER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to prepare every student with the knowledge, skills, values, and vision for life-long success in a changing world.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

Every individual has unique physical, social, intellectual, and emotional needs

Every student has a right to learn in a safe environment

Continuous improvement and the application of knowledge are essential for students to become confident, self-directed, and life-long learners

Educators, parents, students, and the community share responsibility for the advancement of the school's mission

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Betsy Hunt, Longview Elementary School, Murray School District, Visiting Team
Co-chairperson

Andrew Odoardi, Consultant, USOE, Visiting Team Co-chairperson

Phillip Hughes, Timberline Middle School, Alpine School District

John McNeil, West Hills Middle School, Jordan School District

Lesa Peet, Timberline Middle School, Alpine School District

VISITING TEAM REPORT

HUNTER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Hunter Junior High, located in Granite School District, was opened in 1985. The school serves an expanding community in West Valley City. The student population is currently growing and is projected to stabilize at approximately 1,050 students. Hunter Junior High resides in a community made up of largely of single-family housing. The community is largely working class and middle class in terms of socioeconomic status. The majority of students come from two-parent working families, with increasing numbers from single-parent and non-parental guardians. The school has 75 full-time employees and 45 full-time teachers. Fluctuations in student population have been accommodated through the use of portables. The administration and faculty have focused on providing an optimum learning environment, including two technology labs and three computer labs. The data in the school profile includes CRT proficiency and non-proficiency scores for students in grades seven, eight, and nine.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

Hunter Junior High has undergone significant changes within the last three years. The school administration and faculty have demonstrated a strong sense of community and commitment to school improvement in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and school climate. Fifty percent of Hispanic students have not made significant progress on the language arts portion of the CRT, and over 35 percent of the general school population of students tested not proficient. The faculty and administration offer help before school and after school, as well as Saturday school and other extracurricular support for students in all academic subjects.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The Visiting Team recommends that the school mobility factor be included in the school profile, and that the school continue to monitor the data reflecting literacy, numeracy, and community.

Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:

- The Visiting Team recommends a continuing emphasis on language arts support and performance, specifically reading and writing skills. The Visiting Team also recommends an in-depth evaluation of minority student reading skill and progress.
- The administration and faculty are encouraged to continue their efforts to provide extra academic support for students who require additional instruction in order to achieve school success.
- The Visiting Team recommends evaluating instruction based on the data.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

Hunter Junior High School used a broad range of approaches in developing its mission statement, beliefs, and statement of desired results for student learning. A consensus-building process was put in place involving members of the faculty, focus groups, department chairpersons, parents, students, and administrators. The early out days provided the time and opportunity to gain feedback, and made possible the availability of teachers and parents. The process included review, revision, and production of the final draft after some feedback was received from the stakeholders. The final statement of the school's beliefs, mission, and desired results for student learning were distributed to teachers and parents. The mission statement and desired results for student learning are posted in every classroom and throughout the building.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

The self-study accurately reflected the school's current strengths and limitations in an honest and straightforward manner, and provided the necessary data and reflection for the design of the action plans to shape the direction of the school for the next several years.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Hunter Junior High School's desired results for student learning are as follows:

1. Students will develop positive character traits based on ethics
2. Students will use effective oral, written, and nonverbal communication
3. Students will use thinking skills appropriately in diverse situations
4. Students will work cooperatively with others
5. Students will be responsible citizens participating in their community to promote personal and public good
6. Students will learn skills necessary to become productive members of the working community
7. Students will develop skills for life-long success

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

Hunter Junior High has worked very hard to involve the faculty and community in the collaborative process to build a shared vision. Teachers have had many opportunities to attend workshops, in-service, and conferences that can help them. The principal has restructured school the staff, forming three committees to address Teaching and Learning, School Climate, and School Management. The school uses an early out day on Friday for in-service and department meetings in which staff members discuss school problems and ways to improve. The school has attempted to bring the local community into the process, but has had limited success. In addition, further effort is required to increase teacher and community involvement and buy-in.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

The school's beliefs and mission statement clearly identify things the school's administrators and faculty believe are necessary for the students to achieve success in life. The mission statement shows a very positive view of each student's potential and the school's commitment to helping students achieve that potential. The statements are comprehensive and address key issues pertinent to decision-making and policy development in the school. The belief statements indicate that the students **are** the top priority of the school community.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

The mission and belief statements align clearly to support the DRSLs. The goals were chosen by the faculty and staff and have been prioritized after reviewing school scores and teacher recommendations.

Curriculum Development:

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum. In some departments, teachers align courses and lesson plans with the Core Curriculum, national standards, and curriculum maps. Essential knowledge and skills are identified and given priority in the development of the curriculum. The development of the curriculum addresses the diverse learning needs of students without compromising the essential knowledge and skills that all students are expected to achieve.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

The teaching staff recognizes that staff collaboration in curriculum development is an ongoing and continuous process. The school has stated its commitment to align the curriculum with desired results for student learning. The collaborative work to align the curriculum with the DRSLs will occupy the faculty for the next six years.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

Teachers at Hunter Junior High School appropriately use instruction manipulatives, technology, cross-curricular activities, design briefs, overheads, multimedia materials, labs and hands-on activities, and graphic organizers to help the students learn. Teachers are using specific instructional strategies to start and end classes on an academic note that connects to the lesson or unit.

- b) *To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?*

Hunter Junior High School is actively involving students in the learning process through individual, team, and school-wide programs. Individually and school-wide, teachers are accessible to students after school through the Homework Club program and the Math Lab. Math and science classes have implemented “walkaways” to establish learning benchmarks and extra help for the students. Students often work collaboratively in various size groups according to the instructional outcome objectives.

- c) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

Hunter Junior High School students are provided on a consistent basis with a variety of opportunities to receive additional assistance to improve their learning. The students have numerous options for enhancing their educational opportunities and receiving additional instruction or assistance. There are many programs that expose students to extracurricular activities and education. Homework Club is available after school to provide students with an opportunity to make up work, receive further instruction, or take examinations. The Math Department tracks students and mentors those who are experiencing difficulty in math. Remediation and enrichment classes are offered after school and during the summer.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

The Visiting Team discerned that the school uses a variety of assessment/testing strategies which are articulated to focus on the quality of student learning, including observations, group work, and examples of student work, as well as traditional paper-and-pencil assessments, project-based assessments, and portfolios. School-wide assessments are limited to standardized state and national tests and the rubric for the Six Traits of Writing process. The departments indicate a sincere effort to address the desired results for student learning, but now need to develop ways to assess how students meet the indicators and standards for each desired result for student learning.

- b) *To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?*

The Visiting Team found that the selection of the methods for assessing student learning is based on the type of learning to be assessed, the specific performance standards for evaluating student learning, and the purpose of the assessment. The range of assessments in use has identified the information the faculty feels is necessary to make decisions about student learning needs, but the school needs

assistance and time for further articulating and accurately interpreting the data for use in subsequent instruction.

- c) *To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?*

The Visiting Team, in discussions with teachers, students, and counselors, found that assessments of student learning and grading practices are fair. The performance standards and criteria for judging student performance are established and shared with students in advance of the assessment and are consistently applied on an equitable basis.

Assessments appear to be used in a fair and equitable manner. A variety of activities, projects, and assessments are available for students. Most teachers appear to be trying to meet the needs and learning styles of students.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

The school leadership has established a strong and positive academic learning climate in which teaching and learning are actively supported. There is a culture of high expectations for student and faculty performance.

- b) *To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?*

Decisions are directly aligned with the school's beliefs and mission and advance the achievement of the school's goals. The school leadership has recently implemented Utah Behavior Initiative (UBI) to address attendance issues and promote a safe school environment as indicated in the school's belief statements.

- c) *To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?*

The leadership is effective and vigilant in monitoring progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness, as reflected in the profile and in the action plans.

- d) *To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?*

The school leadership ensures that school-wide policies and operational procedures are consistent with the school's beliefs and mission and designed to maximize opportunities for a safe, secure learning environment. The leadership has implemented UBI as a vehicle to correct the attendance problems. Posters around the school reinforce school-wide rules and procedures. The school is clean and neat, and students pass through the halls in a safe, orderly manner.

- e) *To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?*

The leadership fully supports after-school and Saturday tutoring to further "continuous improvement and application of knowledge" as stated in the school belief statements. School resources are also allocated for staff development that supports school improvement efforts.

- f) *To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?*

The Visiting Team observed that the school leadership encourages the school community in a variety of ways. Newsletters are sent home on a monthly basis. Parent nights are offered for academic and family support. The school offers many opportunities for students to display their talents and achievements, and encourages participation on the Community Council. Based on feedback, the school needs to continue in this direction.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

Hunter Junior High is committed to fostering a learning environment for students that nurtures a sense of caring and belonging. The school has many committees and organizations that involve students and parents; however, teachers have expressed a need for collaborative time to develop interdepartmental curricula.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

The school is working toward building a collaborative network of support within the community. The Math Department has made efforts to develop vertical teaming with math teachers from the feeder elementary schools and Hunter High School, where these students will attend high school. The school also offers many clubs and extracurricular activities that engage the students. In addition, the

school does a lot to help 7th grade students adjust to the middle school environment.

In the Visiting Team's meetings with the parents, concerns were expressed about parental involvement and communications from the school. At the same time, the school says it tries very hard to engage parents to participate in school, but express frustration about the lack of parental participation and the lack of student involvement in leadership opportunities. The discrepancy between these viewpoints suggests that there needs to be further effort at face-to-face communication. Another concern was a lack of preparation for 9th graders leaving for high school.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

Hunter Junior High has made a strong attempt to provide training to support the school's goals. Professional development is held every Friday after school. This time has been used to train the staff on reading and writing across the curriculum. The staff has been trained to use the Six Traits of Writing to evaluate student compositions across the curriculum. UBI has provided workshops to address the school climate goals. For the past ten years, the staff has attended the Utah Middle Level Conference and provides in-service during the school professional development days.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

Hunter Junior High is committed to analyzing and evaluating data to provide staff development. The administration supports teachers and staff members in their efforts to improve. Mentors and coaches have been assigned to the inexperienced teachers. Staff members are encouraged to attend various professional training sessions and seminars.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Most Utah public junior high/middle schools are not accredited through NAAS, but only by the USOE—it is their choice to join NAAS or not.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The action plans clearly address the critical areas for follow-up. The action plans address the major concerns identified by the staff and reflected in the profile data. They effectively identify critical areas for improvement. The entire staff is encouraged to focus its efforts on those areas articulated in the action plans that will directly affect student learning and student achievement.

- b) *To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?*

The majority of the school participated in the process of developing the action plan. The community was involved in this process, and a general feeling of commitment exists. The administration is very positive as well as realistic in its evaluation of how committed the faculty is to the process and the completion of the action plans. It was evident to the Visiting Team that the leadership team, administration, and many members of the teaching staff share a strong commitment to the action plans. The administration acknowledges that total buy-in to the process will take time and commitment on their part.

- c) *How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?*

The follow-up processes are generally sound. More attention needs to be given to indicators of improvement or movement toward the desired results for student learning. The school has set dates for accomplishing the action plans, but the plans need to be more specific about indicating responsibility and how progress will be communicated to the school community. In order to monitor school improvement efforts and evaluate their effectiveness, the leadership needs to identify what data/evidence should be collected and periodically/incrementally analyzed by the team. The Visiting Team suggests incremental benchmarks and analyses of how the data from the findings affect instructional strategies, instructional delivery, and curriculum content.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team is impressed with the cleanliness of the building, the welcoming atmosphere, and the posting of the school-wide rules in every room and in the halls.
- The school allows students to enter the school early in order to study or eat. This increases the safety of the student body as well as their ownership of the building.
- The student body is polite and respectful and proud of their learning.
- The school has a total of six labs. It is obvious that the staff has focused on technology and making technology available to students.
- Teachers are risk-takers, willing to start new programs.
- Writing is used across the curriculum.
- The staff is provided with multiple opportunities to participate in workshops that extend their learning. The staff is fully involved in its own lifelong learning and sharing that with the students.
- Many programs are in place to help students achieve academically; these include Saturday school, before- and after-school homework help, and individual teachers being available for one-on-one instruction.
- Students expressed the feeling that the teachers at the school feel like “extra parents.”

Recommendations:

The Visiting Team is in substantial agreement with the quality and number of recommendations that come out of the departmental and focus group analyses and the goals stated in the action plans. These are indicative of the high quality of the self-study effort and the integrity of the processes in working to develop the school improvement plans.

The Visiting Team wishes to provide some focus for the school’s improvement processes and link them to attainable results by virtue of the following recommendations.

- The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty continue to utilize the time/opportunities provided by the early out days for teachers to develop collaboration skills, share best practices, and emphasize the implementation of the school's action plan and recommendations from the Visiting Team.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the action plan include a professional development component on how to establish benchmarks, and that the action plan include a timeline of long- and short-term goals, with realistic benchmarks leading to the dates for implementation and completion. Responsibility for goal achievement might be more specifically noted. The plan ought to be reviewed and revised to reflect the results of continuous data collection and analysis by the departments and continuing focus groups.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the faculty collectively study best practices and research on teaching and assessing the school's DRSLs, and identify indicators and establish the standards for students' demonstration of the DRSLs. Each department should develop a means of evaluating student work tied to the DRSLs in order to determine whether or not students become more effective communicators and better critical thinkers, writers, and citizens, and so on. The faculty may pursue an effort to consolidate some of the DRSLs in order to facilitate the determination of indicators for the design of the assessments.
- The Visiting Team encourages building on the collaborative possibilities that come from the use of the Six Traits of Writing program and the descriptions of indicators and assessments for the DRSLs to conduct horizontal and vertical curriculum mapping and teaming.